

CORRESPONDENCE

Positive Eugenics : A Proposal

To the Editor, *Eugenics Review*

SIR,—When Dr. Blacker first mentioned his idea to me, I was very attracted by it and I am glad that he has now published it for general discussion. It seems clear that on eugenic grounds the scheme would be valuable and I shall therefore confine myself to pointing out a few snags in the hope that we can devise ways of eradicating them.

1. If we are to contemplate children in secondary schools, the following might be a typical picture—first child twelve years, second ten years, third seven or eight years. Is any financial grant going to induce a woman to restart her family after a lapse of seven or eight years? I doubt it. It seems to me that the only hope is to approach women whose last child was born within the previous three years, giving a family picture of, say, first child seven years, second child four or five years, third child two years. This would mean depending on the teacher's estimate of *one child only* (the eldest), which obviously reduces the prognostic value of the family for eugenic purposes. It would also involve making the estimate of the child's superiority after only a year or two at school, and I do not know how reliably this could be done. Can our psychologists clear up this point?

2. The Press and the Pulpit could easily strangle the scheme at birth by cries of "Subsidized stock-breeding" and the like. It would, therefore, be essential, before launching the scheme, to enlist the support of eminent editors and clerics.

3. While it is true that 99 per cent. of parents would be proud of any indication of the superiority of their children, many would be offended at the idea that they were being "paid to reproduce," and most neighbours would certainly be rather scornful of a couple who accepted such financial inducement. The approach would, therefore, have to be along the lines of "Your children are superior. If ever you decide to have another child, let us know and we should be very happy to contribute £— per annum to help your family to take full advantage of all educational opportunities." This would be in the form of a confidential letter, but *after* the extra child was born, a public announcement might be made that "a prize of £— has been awarded to so-and-so's children." Public approbation might thus be gained by the parents, without the risk of public scorn.

4. I disapprove of the suggestion that the grant should be proportional to the parents' income. The social objections to this course seem to me to outweigh any possible advantages. A "means test" is objectionable enough to working-class people, but a "means test in reverse" would be intolerable.

Despite these difficulties, I believe the scheme to be a potentially valuable one and I look forward to full discussion of it.

Yours, etc.,

CYRIL BIBBY.

69 Manor Road,
Chipping Barnet, Herts.

SIR,—I welcome Dr. Blacker's proposal in positive eugenics (April 1946, p. 25). Far too little thought is given to what steps can be taken under a democratic system to further the production of ability. While eminent men are far more likely to have eminent offspring, and in this connection I would refer to the extraordinarily high percentage of eminent fathers in holders of the Order of Merit, the fact remains that nine out of eleven of eminent men are not the sons of eminent men, and if an ordinary normal couple produce two highly desirable children, the chance of further children being highly desirable is very great. After all, the coefficient of correlation is .5.

I do not think that special funds are likely to be forthcoming from the Exchequer nor is it altogether desirable that they should be. Such would lead to a centralized rigid system built up on purely theoretical grounds where we want a system of trial and error. Consider sterilization. We have made no progress. In America, with forty-eight legislating states, by comparative legislation they have the chance to conserve and discard. If we have local associations dealing with such matters from privately raised funds, trial and error has fair play and we should have the stimulus of local patriotism which still exists, witness a Lancashire and Yorkshire cricket match.

One difficulty with regard to Dr. Blacker's actual proposal is that the highly desirable children would probably be about nine or ten years older than the projected child. Economics is not the only factor in planning life. There is the time question. Will many parents be prepared after ten years to upset their scheme of living for the public good? In an article I wrote in 1936 on "Falling Population and Positive Eugenics"* I suggested that any eugenically minded person could found scholarships confined to second or third sons and daughters and fix the conditions of the award so that it might be based on intelligence tests rather than book learning. If many such were in being it might encourage propagation.

We undoubtedly want to try out all methods in all social classes.

B. S. BRAMWELL.

55 Hampstead Way,
London, N.W.11.

* *EUGENICS REVIEW*, 28, 273.